



# *Cross Connection*

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# *Merry Christmas*





# End of Year Giving

## Making 'Extravagant Generosity' a reality in 2011

**By Marlin Fenn**  
President of Council on  
Finance and Administration

Don't you love the mail at this time of year? Not only are there Christmas cards and letters, there are also more solicitations for your money. That's because we are most generous at this time of year.

Christmas is the celebration that God came to live among us. God's sacrificial love in Jesus set the pattern for how we are to live among each other. Especially at Christmas, we are reminded to think beyond ourselves. It's part of how we connect with the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

In the connection of The United Methodist Church, we

share with each other the cost of doing ministry beyond the local congregation. We make sacrifices to do this ministry because God works through us together more effectively than through each of us alone.

We can be pleased that so much good work happens because of the generosity of our people. Together we are leading ministry in issues of poverty and improving health globally, creating new places of worship and revitalizing existing ones as well as developing principled Christian leaders for the church and for the world. These ministries depend upon our contributions.

The churches of our Annual Conference are mission minded. In 2010 our congregations gave over \$18.5

million for shared connectional ministry (apportionments) and another \$21 million in outreach ministry beyond that. Over \$8 million of that \$21 million was for United Methodist mission and outreach beyond what our conference budget supports. Nearly \$13 million of that \$21 million was for non-United Methodist outreach such as food banks, non-connectional mission work, tragedy relief, emergency assistance, etc.

There's no lack of generosity among our people. We are generous because God is generous.

As of the end of November, our churches have contributed 61.71% of our shared connectional ministry. Some of our congregations

have already completed their shared connectional giving. Others are working hard to do so. It's our hope that all our churches will give every effort to contribute 100% of their conference ministry support. It makes a difference.

There are many needs this season. Remember the work God is doing through our shared connectional ministry.

After our shared ministry goals are met, we encourage you to look next to other United Methodist ministries, such as Fair Share goals, and then to other places of need to share God's extravagant generosity.

Together we can bless many lives in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Cross Connection is the official publication of the Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

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## Tidings of Joy



I love Christmas—especially Christmas Eve. The shepherds, angels and stars announce not merely an old thing that happened long ago, but a new thing that happens that night. On this night—Christmas Eve night—God makes all things new. It is a night in which eternity enters into time. It is the night of Jesus' birth. It is a night for

rejoicing in the love of God.

Christmas Eve is a night for the whole earth to lean forward just a bit to hear angel voices. It is a night to peer into the sky's darkness for the advent of a new star. It is a night to listen for the fluttering of unseen wings. Feet planted on earth—and for a moment—companions dwelling with the stars. Earth, heaven and the smallest child are woven together in the same vast web of creation.

It all seems too heavenly. Yet, on Christmas Eve, the astonishing, amazing love between God and humanity becomes as real and ordinary as the cry of a newborn child. The Power who created all the galaxies in the heavens and the stars in their courses comes to birth as a sweet, innocent

Baby. On Christmas Eve, we delight in Mystery and let our hearts be filled with joy.

Perhaps it was something like that when the shepherds watched over their flocks by night: stars burning brightly in



the sky, the wind blowing gently against their faces, and the earth warm and rich. Luke says, "An angel appeared, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, so that they were filled with fear. 'Do not be afraid, for I bring you good

news of a great joy which will be for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Messiah and Lord.'" Angels dancing among the stars. The shepherd dancing on earth. What a gift! What love! What joy!

This is Christmas joy. It's not simply joy in the happy moments when things are going right. It is joy in the poignant moments, the humorous moments, the sad moments, the moments of quietness and solitude. It is the joy of the family holding hands at the Christmas table. It is the joy of receiving a simple, handmade gift from one you love. It is the joy of writing a note to someone who will always be a part of the rhythm of your life. It is joy of helping to feed a hungry child

whose eyes seem to pierce your heart. It is the joy of forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply. It is the joy of eating the bread and drinking the wine and experiencing again both the mystery of God and the mystery of humanity. What can one know at such a time as Christmas Eve? What can one say? The poet W. H. Auden put it this way,

*"I know nothing except what everyone  
Knows—if there when Grace  
dances,  
I should dance."*

May the angel's glad tidings of joy echo in your soul this Christmas Eve.

*Bishop Janice Riggle Huie*

## Guess Who: Can you name this staff member? BABY CONTEST Revelation "profile"



**Name:** Dorothy Jeanette Kuykendall Ervin  
I was named Dorothy Jeanette because my grandmother wanted me named after my mother and my mother named herself when she was 21 years old and picked her name because it meant "gift from God." She wanted another name for me that meant the

same thing so "Jeanette" became my middle name for that reason. With my last name being so long and hard to spell, they called me "Jan."

### **Where were you born?**

Coahoma County, Mississippi near Jackson

### **What did you do between high school and starting to work here?**

My first job was with Walter Pye's Clothing Stores as their computer operator. In 1977 we had Michael who is now 34 years old and is the Communications Director for Bellaire UMC. He and his wife-Chrissy have two boys: Gabriel, 9 years old and Benton 6. They are the apple of their Poppy and Mimi's eyes. I also worked for St. Joseph Hospital in College and General Homes at their LaPorte Subdivision location. I worked there until I had a gun held on me by one of the contractors wanting his money and then I left! I worked at my church (Deer

Park UMC) as general church secretary, handling everything from sound to finances, plumbing and correspondence for 10 years. In 1987, we discovered our second child sitting in Santa's lap at our church's Fall Festival. We found out that Brittany was a special needs foster child, having weighed only 1 lb. 7 ozs., and 12 ¼ inches long at birth. Her fate, according to the doctors, was not good but we adopted Brittany anyway. Brittany will be 25 years old next May, and just received her Master's Degree. God has helped her exceed all the doctor's ever hoped for her to be able to do. I then moved up to the Business Administrator position for Pasadena-First UMC, where I stayed 10 years before joining the Conference staff six years ago as Administrative Assistant for the Area Provost position.

**Describe a typical day:** I love making a difference. We serve as the liaison office

between the 700+ churches and 9 district offices and the 1200+ clergy (active & retired), to the conference offices. It takes about 9 months to plan and execute the annual conference for 2500+ people who attend. We also handle the publishing of the Pre-Conference Journal for conference.

### **What is your favorite pastime once you leave work?**

Music, Fishing & Gardening. I play in the Praise Band at church, and sing in the Chancel Choir. Allen and I played music professionally for 12 years in a band here in Houston called Riverside in the country club circuit, and special events. I try to fish every Friday, but I let the weather decide whether or not it's a good fishing day. I work at gardening as an ongoing project. I love yard work and having flowers in abundance.

### **Do you have a favorite**

**scripture or life lesson to share?** *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13* It was my mother's favorite verse and one she quoted quite often. She was the epitome of that verse and lived by its meaning throughout her life. I have tried my best to keep that going as an example to all.

**Complete this sentence...Cross Connection readers would probably be surprised to know that I:** I was also adopted. It was very interesting when we were in the midst of adopting Brittany, because I was able to hear stories I had never heard about my adoption from my mother. Adoption is a wonderful gift from God and a gift that I wanted to carry forward by adopting a child. Brittany has also vowed to carry forward the gift and try to adopt at least one child when she is ready to have a family.



# Tis the season. . . to seek un



## Brazos Valley P.E.T. Project — the Gift of Mobility



## TAC Seeks Funding



ty were to be put in one line, it would stretch for 28,000 miles.

**Solution:** Personal Energy Transportation devices (or PETS): three-wheel wagon-like devices that allow riders to use their upper arm strength to get around.

“These hand-cranked vehicles are built with hauling capacity to enable the owner to make an income,” explains Rick Sitton, senior pastor of First UMC in Bryan. When members of First UMC in Bryan learned of this need and the innovative device to provide a solution, they opened an assembly shop and launched the Brazos Valley P.E.T. Project. “Our shop has produced over 600 units that have shipped to over 35 countries,” adds shop foreman Chester Jones.

PET is an all-volunteer operation with almost 100 contributing shops worldwide, so Bryan members are thrilled when youth groups and others come to the shop to help with production and shipping. Adds Pastor Sitton, “First United Methodist Church Bryan will be glad to host volunteer work groups overnight in the Christian Life Center—especially youth groups in the summer.”

The cost of producing and shipping one unit is approximately \$250. Many people choose to support this vital PET ministry with cash or in-kind donations to help cover material costs. To join in providing the GIFT OF MOBILITY,



**The statistics are astounding:** some 21,000,000 people in third world countries must crawl around on the ground or be carried because of handicaps from land mines, leprosy, birth defects and malnutrition. If all who are literally prisoners of immobility

**To donate by mail, please print out the donation form at <http://petbrazosvalley.org>, fill it in and send it along with your donation to:**  
**P.E.T. Project Texas, Inc.**  
**506 East 28th Street**  
**Bryan, Texas 77803**

## Welcoming sojourners is a responsibility intended us to be one. Doing so is a sign

**Dilemma:** Many immigrants have a legal right to be in the States, but cannot afford legal fees to obtain the required documents.

**Solution:** The United Methodist Church established a ministry program called **Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON)** in 1999 to provide free, professional legal services to immigrants who cannot otherwise afford them. The Texas Annual Conference hopes to join the national network of JFON providers in 2012 to provide services to all without regard for race, gender or religion.

“As United Methodists, we want to be advocates for immigration systems that affirm the worth, dignity and inherent value and rights of migrants,” says Diane McGehee. “This program helps people comply with the law as well as ensuring that all people benefit from rights that are theirs under our laws.”





# Unique giving opportunities



## for 'JFON' Ministry

*Response to our belief that God loves another's neighbors. A ministry of faithfulness.*

*By helping those who need legal services, but cannot afford them, we seek to build communities of love by building relationships with our neighbors that we may love one another, not in word or tongue, but in truth and action. (1 John 3:18)*

### Get involved

Individuals and congregations can support the work of Justice For Our Neighbors Immigration Ministry for the Texas Annual Conference by:

- Making checks out to the Texas Annual Conference
- Writing in the memo line: 2012 Advance Special JFON
- Mailing to the conference office: 5215 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77002 to the attention of the Center for Missional Excellence

In addition, the Justice For Our Neighbors program, once established in the TAC, will need volunteers. In particular, the program needs licensed immigration attorneys to provide pro bono work with the JFON clinics.

For persons who are not attorneys, there are many other opportunities for volunteering at the legal clinics, such as coordinating monthly intake, providing hospitality and childcare, performing intake interviews, or using bilingual skills (Some training may be required). To get involved, contact the Center for Missional Excellence at 713-521-9383.



## Asbury House expansion nears completion

On some mornings three-year-old Ke'Miyah is slow to wake up. But as soon as her mom mentions getting up for school at the Asbury House, she jumps up with a smile on her face. "Since her first day I have been blown away by the love and compassion the staff has for children," says mom Keyanna Lewis. "I was even more amazed when Ke'Miyah said the Pledge of Allegiance and Texas flag, and multiple phrases in Spanish. I would like to thank Ms. Pam and staff and contributors for providing my daughter with this wonderful experience at Asbury House."

At a Glance ([www.asburyhouse.net](http://www.asburyhouse.net))

- Established over 25 years ago in Longview, Texas to offer child care for ages 3-5 at a reduced rate for low income families
- A \$500,000 expansion to 7000 square feet is due for "debt free" completion by early 2012 and will allow the school to accommodate up to 60 children, many of whom have long been on the waiting list.
- Under the umbrella of TAC, funding comes from the East District, Methodist churches, donors, other community churches and special events.

**Would you like to make a difference through this ministry?**



Longtime Director Pam Surles' perspective:

*"Due to the economic conditions and an ever-expanding waiting list, we took a leap of faith to start building this 3400-ft expansion, and we are close to having it paid off, but still welcome help to officially get us there. Our client families range from single parents that make \$10/hr or less, great grandparents that are raising a child, and sometimes even families where one of the parents is in prison. We are much more than a child care facility because we offer academics, Bible based teaching, we help connect our families to community resources. I am blessed to be a part of this ministry and so appreciative of donors contributing to our expansion, and area church groups that have adopted all of our families for Christmas."*

**To Donate...call Pam at 903-758-7062 or send a check to the Asbury House Building Fund c/o 320 S. Center, Longview, Tx 75601. To be included on the Wall of Honor, gifts must be received by December 31.**



# Is God calling you?

## Faith-forming Relationships

### Exploration 2011 — conference provides insight for ministry-focused youth

By Brant Mills  
Web Content Manager

When Tiffany Tadlock first heard about attending Exploration 2011, she didn't want to go. She said after attending Annual Conference and seeing the election process, she was in a mindset where she didn't want to do ministry. "There was a lot of talk about getting younger generations involved... I felt like people were telling us to do it, but no one was wanting us to. Then I went [to Exploration] and it was amazing. There were so many young people interested in ministry." She said it opened her eyes to see so many of her peers "who have a passion for ministry and love doing it."

Tadlock, a student at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, was among a group of 23 who traveled from Texas to St. Louis, Missouri to attend Exploration — a biennial event for young adults who want the chance to explore God's call to ordained ministry through worship, prayer, workshops, network-



**Tiffany Tadlock, a student at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas says she was once totally closed off to the idea of ordained ministry. After attending Exploration 2011, she says her outlook has "drastically changed."**

Tadlock said attending Exploration "drastically changed" how she views ordained ministry. "I once was closed off to the idea and now I'm completely open to it."

her theological education was really helpful.

"It was an amazing experience; it was great because I got to leave the everyday world on a weekend and it got

me really pumped up to actually work for God. I really liked the speakers...they held my attention for a ridiculously long time. I really could apply what

they were saying to my life. It really resonated with me, and I would definitely recommend it to others. Everyone should go if they are feeling at all called to ministry."

At the event, Lon Morris College student and life-long United Methodist Roxanne Deal had a lot of questions answered about the ordination process and steps to take. "I was considering going into

ministry but didn't know where I was going to fit. They explained deacons vs. elders, and I decided I was leaning more toward the elder route. The speakers were moving and worship was great — especially Adam Hamilton. I heard a lot of new information. I had no idea what types of degrees you needed to get through ordination or what options were available. It moved me to consider being an elder."

Kendal Carnley, a student in the church careers program at Lon Morris College had previously attended Exploration in 2009 in Dallas and said he went again expecting spiritual renewal. "I knew I wanted to do ministry and had fallen off that path... I mainly went to reaffirm my path."

His favorite part was hearing Adam Hamilton speak. "He spoke for over an hour and kept my attention the whole time. I've never seen a speaker keep college age students' attention for that long."

Carnley added that he

appreciated the focus on navigating through ordination. "There were just a lot of really good ideas and helpful information on seminary and ordination. A lot of people don't know about the ordination process. They think they should wait till they're halfway through seminary, but it's helpful to understand the process."

Ashley Hamel, a social work major at the University of North Texas, said she went to Exploration because of an opportunity to help out with the youth ministry at her home church that she really enjoyed over the summer.

Hamel said she went hoping for clarity but instead found many more paths into ministry that she could choose from. "I found out there are endless ways to be able to work in the church," she said, adding, "I got way more than I expected out of the weekend and was able to network and broaden ideas of what I wanted to do after I graduate."

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**"We wanted to send young people whose pastors or campus ministers have noticed that they have gifts for ministry. We tried to find young people who are serious about exploring that call further."**

**Rev. Taylor Meador-Fuerst**  
Associate Director  
Center for Clergy Excellence

ing, and small groups.

"It was not like camps and things I've been to," she continued. "Everyone was friendly and trying to get to know everyone else. The theology schools were not at all like organizational fairs I'd been to. They remembered your face and would talk to you about theology for an hour. That's something I wasn't expecting."

Sadie Brink, a senior at University of Texas in Austin said she wasn't sure what to expect. "I just kind of went in hoping to meet others my age wanting to do what I did. Since I already have a pretty great picture of where God is calling me — to be an elder and campus minister — I got a lot out of talking to different seminaries." She said learning about different ways to fund

they were saying to my life. It really resonated with me, and I would definitely recommend it to others. Everyone should go if they are feeling at all called to ministry."



**Attending this event for a second time, Austin Woods of Lon Morris College received his affirmation of being on the right track for ministry.**



# Ministry Snapshots

## Texas Conference Website Adds Mobile Support

You may have noticed the new mobile version of [txcumc.org](http://txcumc.org). Now when you visit the conference web site from commonly used mobile platforms, a leaner version of the site automatically loads. However, if you prefer the full site you can still access that as well by choosing the full site link at the bottom of the listings.

Seeing more and more users access web sites with smart phones and tablets, several United Methodist Annual Conferences went in together to provide mobile users more efficient access to the information most frequently sought. We looked at different options, including

platform-specific and device specific apps. A mobile site makes much more sense than these because it

platforms at a substantially lower cost and



will allow a larger number of users to benefit from its use. offers greater flexibility and compatibility across multiple

will allow a larger number of users to benefit from its use.

### Included Features:

- Location Aware Church

**Search** – If your device has location services enabled, you have the option of allowing your device to list churches based on your location. Churches within 25 miles will show up automatically. Since it accesses data from national sources, this feature will work anywhere in the U.S. Select a church and you will have access to a Google map and directions. If you choose not to use location services, you can search for churches by name, city, or zip code.

- **People Search** - Need to call or e-mail someone on the go? Search for them and contact them directly through your device.
- **Content** - The latest news

and information is also loaded from features and news items as well as classifieds and blogs. Additionally there are links to the conference calendar, as well as Conference Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Access to the mobile site is simple. When you visit [txcumc.org](http://txcumc.org) from a mobile device, you will be automatically re-directed on supported devices. You may visit the mobile site directly by going to [www.txcumc.org/mobilesite](http://www.txcumc.org/mobilesite). An alternate view is available at [www.txcumc.org/skimmer](http://www.txcumc.org/skimmer).

*(\*\*\*Please be aware that fees may apply for using location services or data services depending on your carrier and plan. Check with your phone provider for additional details).*

## Conference Report Day

For 2012, report



day information will be entered into the GCFA system called “EZRA.” Your information should be entered by January 8-9. To access the login screen for this system go to [ezra.gcfa.org](http://ezra.gcfa.org)

To login, enter your

church’s GCFA number and your password which may be obtained from your district office. Additional information including a training video is available at [www.txcumc.org/ezra](http://www.txcumc.org/ezra)

Also, don’t forget to

complete the Missional Excellence Year End Report ([www.txcumc.org/mereport2011](http://www.txcumc.org/mereport2011)) and the Church Transformation Survey ([www.txcumc.org/transformationssurvey](http://www.txcumc.org/transformationssurvey)).

## MLK Breakfast 2012

The Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast Celebration will be held on Monday, January 16, 2012, Power Center, 12401 South Post Oak Road, Houston.

Table sponsorships are as follows (10 seats per table):

- Platinum Table (\$1,000)
- Gold Table (\$750.00)
- Silver Table (\$500.00)
- Bronze Table (\$250.00)
- Individual Ticket (\$25.00)

Questions may be directed to: Frances Dunlap at 281- 999-5114 [francesl.dunlap@sbcglobal.net](mailto:francesl.dunlap@sbcglobal.net), or Anna Loraine Vienn at 713-729-8142 or [classycakes@gmail.com](mailto:classycakes@gmail.com). Checks should be made payable and mailed to: BMCR 3014 Hutchins, Houston, Texas 77004.



**Bishop Janice Riggle Huie speaking at the 2011 MLK Breakfast.**



## Exploration 2011 — conference provides insight for ministry-focused youth

*Continued from page 6*



**University of North Texas' student, Ashley Hamel got more than she expected out of the weekend by networking and broadening her ideas of what she wanted to do after graduation.**

I'm still exploring the specific route God is leading me to. The whole weekend was really awesome. We had different bishops and pastors talk with us and ask discernment questions about where we were called. There were different workshops based on specific calls to ministry — youth ministry, college ministry, multicultural missions..."

She was also excited about the opportunity to meet others from her home conference. "I was there from support of my Wesley Foundation in a different conference than the Texas conference, but being able to network and have relationships with others from my conference was a big blessing to

me."

"The best part," she continued, "was being split into small groups and being able to have intimate spiritual discussions with people from different outlooks on life... What surprised me the most was I felt in such community even though I'd met maybe 20 people. The common ground we were all in: We knew God was going to use us, but how?"

Austin Woods from Lon Morris College said his story is different from others who went. Attending for the second time, he said he basically had everything figured out. "The services were awesome in 2009 and I was like — there's no way I'm going to pass up

another chance to go!"

Woods ended up going to reaffirm that what he was trying to do was right. "It was absolutely amazing — just being in the environment... all these young people interested in learning if ministry is right for them. In a college, you know one or two of us. There were 600 of us there. The worship and workshops were really energetic — really passionate. Each speaker brought their own feeling, their own passion to the table. They gave me hope that one day that's what we could be like — very passionate, very faithful."

He noted that "God is present at these events. Both times I've attended, I've really experienced God. When you gather with people your age who are all interested in the same things, it's nice to know I'm not as weird as I thought I was. I tell people about Exploration all the time. Even if you don't think ministry is right for you I think it's still a great event to go to. You can be deacon or elder or lay minister — you don't have to be ordained. Everybody can see what is out there — what you can do."

Rev. Taylor Meador Fuerst, Associate Director for the Texas Annual Conference Center for Clergy Excellence, said several students attended the event with little or no cost to themselves. "We know that college students and young people in their early 20s are at a critical time of exploring their vocation—who God is calling them to be in the world. We were looking for young people who, in the midst of that discernment and exploration, feel God tugging them toward professional ministry. We wanted to send young people whose pastors or campus ministers have noticed that they have gifts for ministry. We tried to find young people who are serious about exploring that call further."

Rev. Becky Love, Pastor

at Diboll UMC, worked with the team that helped plan and organize the trip and assist students who wanted to attend. She said it was a wonderful sight to see so many young adults in one place worshipping God with such passion. "There was a time of commitment, communion, and awesome music led by Mark Miller. There was energy in the room that continued after worship."

"The young adults had a wide variety of workshops from which to choose and all 13 of the United Methodist seminaries were present to talk to interested students," Love continued. "I would certainly recommend it to any young adult who is discerning a call from God to some kind of ministry. But I don't believe it is my recommendation that holds much weight. I believe if one were to talk to any of the young adults who attended, they would recommend

Exploration 2013 because it will be an inspiring and worthwhile event."

Fuerst noted that some who attended were sponsored by their local church and that The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry offers to reimburse the registration fee for anyone age 18-26 who is coming to the event for the first time. "If you apply for the scholarship, they reimburse you after you actually attend the event. We provided a free flight to those who applied to complete an application and have a recommendation letter from their pastor.) We are so grateful to local churches that identify and seize the opportunity to invest in a future church leader!"

*Learn more about exploration and see videos from the event at [www.txcumc.org/explorationinfo2011](http://www.txcumc.org/explorationinfo2011).*



**Sadie Brink, a senior at University of Texas in Austin enjoyed researching ways to fund her theological education.**

**What is your congregation doing to invest in youth? This is one of the Conference's priorities for 2012. Send stories to Editor, Thelma Jones at [thelmaj@methodists.net](mailto:thelmaj@methodists.net).**